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AUTHOR	Rhodes-Kline, Anne K.
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ABSTRACT

Administrators, trained Reading Recovery teachers, teachers in training, classroom teachers, and parents of Reading Recovery students from across the state of Maine were asked to complete surveys about their impressions of the Reading Recovery program during the 1994-95 school year. Respondents' comments were summarized by Reading Recovery team leaders from 10 sites in Maine. Results showed considerable enthusiasm for Reading Recovery. Concerns focused mainly on the future of funding and the equitable selection of children for the program. The individual questionnaires contained mainly open-ended, qualitative questions. Some items also asked respondents to rate the Reading Recovery program (or an aspect of the program) on a Likert-type scale. Of the 1,172 questionnaires sent to parents, 843 were returned, a response rate of 72%. Of the 235 administrator questionnaires, 189 were returned, for an 80% response rate. Of the 122 trained Reading Recovery teachers, 101 questionnaires were returned completed, for an 83% return rate. Of the 90 questionnaires distributed to the Reading Recovery teachers in training, 86 were returned, for a response rate of 96%. Of the 503 questionnaires distributed to classroom teachers, 399 were returned, for a response rate of 79%. Contains numerous comments from the completed questionnaires. (NKA)

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Reading Recovery Qualitative Surveys Summary Report

Anne K. Rhodes-Kline

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1994-95

Reading Recovery Qualitative Surveys Summary Report

Prepared by Anne K. Rhodes-Kline

This report was prepared in an effort to identify the attitudes of parents, administrators, and teachers to the Reading Recovery program in Maine. Surveys were distributed to a sample of administrators and classroom teachers in elementary schools with Reading Recovery (a program for first graders at risk for literacy failure), all parents of children in the Reading Recovery program, and all Reading Recovery teachers. Surveys were collected at each Reading Recovery site by Teacher Leaders. Teacher Leaders tallied the surveys received, summarized the responses, and sent this information, along with representative comments, to the Center for Early Literacy. Based on that information, I prepared this report for the University of Maine College of Education, the Center for Early Literacy, and the Maine State Department of Education.

University of Maine Center for Early Literacy
Reading Recovery Program
Qualitative Surveys Summary Report

Administrators, trained Reading Recovery teachers, teachers in training, classroom teachers, and parents of Reading Recovery students from across the state of Maine were asked to complete surveys about their impressions of the Reading Recovery program in the 1994-95 school year. The evaluations were returned to the Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders, who summarized respondents' comments from their sites and turned in response summaries to the Center for Early Literacy. Data were returned from Teacher Leaders at ten sites in Maine. The results show considerable enthusiasm for Reading Recovery. Concerns focused on the future of funding and the equitable selection of children for the program.

The individual questionnaires contained mainly open-ended, qualitative questions. Some items also asked respondents to rate the Reading Recovery program (or an aspect of the program) on a Likert-type scale. Both these quantitative ratings and the qualitative answers are summarized. Following each direct quotation is the name of the site, in parentheses, from which the comment originated.

Parents

One thousand, one hundred seventy-two questionnaires were distributed to parents of Reading Recovery students. Of these, 843 were returned, a rate of 72%. Parents were asked for their views of Reading Recovery, on a scale of 1 (not a very good program) to 5 (a very good program). The mean response was 4.9 (S=.25). Parents were enthusiastic and very positive about the program and the gains made by their children.

> Made a world of difference. (Benton)
>
> I believe that this program has greatly helped my son in reading and made him feel equal to other students in his class. (Westbrook)
>
> She is trying to read everything; she wasn't doing that before RR. (Westbrook)
>
> It taught my son how to read completely because he couldn't read a single word before. I am very grateful to the RR Program. (Westbrook)
>
> She is now able to help other kids in their reading. It has also helped her with her writing and spelling. (Westbrook)
>
> Made him enjoy going to school now. (Westbrook)

Thank you so much for allowing my child this opportunity. She has blossomed into a young gal who enjoys books, and reading for the first time. (Westbrook)

When I first found out that [child] was having problems in reading, it really bothered me, because my other son had that same problem but he didn't get the help that [child] is getting. My son ended up quitting school because he had so many problems. I can't say enough good things about the RR program. (Westbrook)

It has made her feel like a part of the class. (Westbrook)

RR was a crucial element in [child]'s early education. If RR had not been an option for him, reading (and all future subjects) would have been a constant failure. This program has provided the support that he needed. (Westbrook)

She comes home with 1 to 3 books daily and has to read them right away, over and over again. I wish every child could have this advantage. She is proud to have her own library card. (Westbrook)

He comes home and gets his sisters and he wants to read and gets upset if someone interrupts him. He wants to go buy new books for at home. (Westbrook)

This has saved my son from years of agony in school. (Westbrook)

It's amazing the 'new world' that she is discovering for herself. (University-Ellsworth)

Obviously this has, and will, greatly improve his academic experiences for the rest of his life. (University-Ellsworth)

I wish it could have been there for *my* early grades. (University-Ellsworth)

The kids get help early, and they don't think it's terrible that they have to go for extra reading; they think it's fun. (University-Ellsworth)

Never realized that so little time, daily, over a few months, could possibly have such an enormous effect! (University-Ellsworth)

I think this program made the difference in our son's school experience so much that otherwise he may have had to repeat 1st Grade. (South Portland)

Many parents also liked the contacts with the Reading Recovery teacher and the information about the program that was shared with them.

Help can't stop at the end of the school day, a lot has to happen at home. (Enfield Station)

I really enjoyed the 'Behind the Glass' session, it gave me a better idea of what the program is all about. (Enfield Station)

[RR teacher] kept us very well informed via telephone, conferences, and written communication progress reports. (Westbrook)

I appreciated the teacher taking time to personally contact me by phone or notes, it showed a sincere caring for my child's progress. (Enfield Station)

Administrators

Two hundred thirty-five administrator questionnaires were distributed; of these, 189 were returned for an 80% response rate. When asked to rate Reading Recovery on a scale from 1 (not a very good program) to 5 (a very good program), administrators' average (mean) response was 4.9, and no one responded with less than a 4 (standard deviation (S) =.34). It is clear that Reading Recovery had tremendous support from school administrators.

I feel this is one of the better programs we have. (Washington County)

This is . . . something we spend money on that gives us a return in better education for children. (Wiscasset)

The impact has been seen in the regular first grade classes. Teachers have changed expectations and teaching techniques. (Westbrook)

The program continues to offer the most promising strategies for at-risk readers. (University/Ellsworth)

All Reading Recovery children [at our school] would have had special education referrals at the end of K or earlier. None of them ended up there. (University/Ellsworth)

[I have] no concerns with Reading Recovery. My main concern is with supportive classroom practices. (Caribou)

Most administrators were not only supportive of Reading Recovery themselves, but felt that faculty in their schools were also enthusiastic about it.

[Teachers] are very positive about the program. They still feel it doesn't serve enough children. (Westbrook)

This is not a staff that jumps easily on 'bandwagons.' The fact that there is such school wide support is a measure of how good the program is. (University/Ellsworth)

[Teachers] feel it is worthwhile but expensive. (Westbrook)

Most also felt that parents were enthusiastic about the program, even parents of children who did not receive Reading Recovery.

Parents of students . . . in Reading Recovery are very positive. Others are comforted to know that we have a preventative measure in place. (Westbrook)

Parents are very supportive of the program and are amazed at its outcome. (Washington County)

Although administrators' comments overall were quite positive, some concerns were expressed. Many of these centered around funding.

My biggest concern is that state and federal funding for this program, including the continued training of more teachers, continue. It is vital to the program's continuation as local budgets are being cut. (Enfield Station School)

I would like more students to receive RR, but not at the expense of regular classroom resources. (Benton)

Some administrators raised equity issues, suggesting that the process of selecting children for Reading Recovery might not be as fair as it could be.

[I am concerned about] the high cost and the small number of children involved. (Westbrook)

I want to provide the same high quality instruction to every child in every class. (Westbrook)

I'm concerned about "wasting" resources and time on students that show minimal benefit when there are many "wait listed" students who would take off with this program. (Westbrook)

[Teachers say we] need to look carefully at who we select (students) to participate in Reading Recovery. (Westbrook)

Trained Teachers

One hundred twenty-two trained Reading Recovery teachers returned 101 completed questionnaires for an 83% return rate. When asked how much they had learned in the past year on a scale from 1 (nothing) to 5 (a great deal), the mean response was 4.1 (S=.62). Nearly half the trained teachers responded with the highest rating.

When asked to rate Reading Recovery between 1 (not a very good program) and 5 (a very good program), the mean response was 4.9 (S=.35). Eighty-nine teachers (94% of those responding), reported that they viewed it a "very good program."

Reading Recovery Teachers responded to qualitative questions about the highlights of the year for them and about their concerns. Many voiced enthusiasm for the children's progress. Many also voiced concerns about their own professional development, and some related that they had had difficulties in coordinating with classroom teachers or parents.

> [The highlight of the year was] watching my hardest to teach child progress from level A to level 8 - even though it took nearly the whole year. (Westbrook)

> It is so exciting to see the children succeed and build a self-extending system. This is a highlight because I know these children will be confident in the classroom. (Caribou)

> I have found the continuing contact sessions so valuable as we were able to dig deeper into the theory of why something was or was not happening with a child. (Caribou)

> Behind the glass is always a learning experience. (Enfield Stanton)

> [The most valuable aspect of inservice sessions for trained teachers was] BTG. (Westbrook)

The most often voiced concerns were to continue improving professionally and to avoid burnout. Professional contacts were greatly missed by many trained Reading Recovery teachers.

> I love teaching Reading Recovery, but I want to constantly upgrade my observational skills. I have felt a bit abandoned this year. (Westbrook)

> The method is great, but the isolation is boring. I can see how easy it would be to get Reading Recovery burnout. There are too many extra expectations of Reading Recovery teachers. (Westbrook)

> I have found the videos and tapes really valuable - they are the best teaching I have had short of being at a conference. (Westbrook)

> I'm concerned that I might become complacent. (Enfield Stanton)

[My greatest concern is] there seems to be less and less contact with people who have the info on new research and findings concerning RR. (Westbrook)

I have found it difficult to monitor my own growth as a RR teacher in this district. I feel as though I am facing the same problems as last year with less feedback on my own progress. (Westbrook)

Since I am on my own, I miss having a RR colleague to discuss problems with. (Westbrook)

[My greatest concern is] keeping in contact with peers and the teacher leader. (Westbrook)

There will never be enough contact of the kind of contact I had my training year. But it's been great having a teacher-in-training this year so that there's finally someone at my school to discuss things with. (Westbrook)

Another concern of Reading Recovery teachers, although not expressed nearly as often as that of professional growth, is the idea of working as a team with parents of students and with classroom teachers.

I have had some unusually uncooperative parents this year. However, others have observed lessons, received written/verbal/telephone summaries of progress and responded in ways that helped accelerate progress. (Westbrook)

I wish the RR teachers and classroom teachers could work as a team to help the children. (Westbrook)

Teachers in Training

Ninety questionnaires were distributed to the Reading Recovery teachers-in-training, and 86 were returned, a rate of 96%. One question asked for a quantitative answer to the following, "As a Reading Recovery teacher, how much have you learned this year?" Answers could be a number from 1 (nothing) to 5 (a great deal). The average was 4.9 (S=.27), with 92% of the respondents using the highest category. Some of the comments from teachers-in-training reflected what they had learned over the past year.

Natural language learning occurs if children are read to regularly. (Benton)

[I have gained a] better understanding of how kids learn to read (i.e., self-extending system). (Benton)

[My views of the reading process and the teaching of reading have changed] greatly! Never have I contemplated so thoroughly the processing and strategies involved in the act of reading. (Westbrook)

I have learned a great deal about the reading process in my RR training. Since this is my first full year teaching, I guess my views of the reading process were formed from my college classes in reading and student teaching experiences. I feel strongly that now I know what the reading process is all about, especially after seeing it first hand. (Westbrook)

Seeing a nonreader become a reader has been a highlight of the year. I know that it affords him the confidence and skills to succeed. It is, for him, life-changing. (Caribou)

Many of the comments emphasized that the training process is exciting and professionally invigorating. These comments dovetail with the comments of trained teachers who longed for more of this food for professional growth, and they underscore the importance of continued professional development for Reading Recovery teachers.

[The highlight of my teaching experience this year has been] the TL [Teacher Leader] site visits, the discussions during and after the BTG [Behind the Glass], the discussions and give and take have been extremely helpful for me in learning the whys and hows of Reading Recovery. (Westbrook)

As I have made shifts in my thinking on how to best teach the lowest students I have also been through a process of re-examination of my teaching of all children. It has helped me to ferret out the most basic goals of my teaching and think about the most appropriate ways of getting there. (University/Ellsworth)

I have been busy always, tired more than not, and often overwhelmed; but I am unable to think of any experiences that were not valuable. (Westbrook)

[Reading Recovery training] has changed and refined the way I teach reading and given me new understandings of how children learn to read. It has also re-energized me and given me a new lease on life as a teacher. I really needed and was ready for a change. (Westbrook)

I have never experienced any course or training which has so effectively connected theory and practice. (Enfield Stanton)

I believe all educators need some form of BTG and colleague visitations frequently. (Enfield Stanton)

I am now able to handle criticism as it improves my teaching. (Washington County)

Other comments included enthusiastic statements about children who had learned to read because of Reading Recovery.

> [The highlight of my teaching experience this year has been] seeing a child that I thought would have to be withdrawn make connections at level 12 and begin to sail through the reading process. He was a hard to reach student who was not receiving consecutive lessons. (Westbrook)

Some teachers described frustrations with their first year of Reading Recovery, and suggestions for how that first year might be improved for others.

> I found the first few months of feeling so inadequate in what I was doing didn't do much for me as a person. I wish there [were] more of a foundation before you actually get started. (Westbrook)

> I wish there were more times during the year when we could have slowed down and "over learned" some of the aspects of the program like MSV and book introductions. (Westbrook)

> It is very frustrating to realize that I am the only help a child gets other than the class teacher unless the child is labeled for spec. ed. The stress of trying to do two jobs well has been tough. I feel that my regular teaching has been hurt somewhat by this training year because of my new attention to Reading Recovery. (Westbrook)

> I wish the RR teachers and classroom teachers could work as a team to help the children. (Westbrook)

> [Lack of] parental involvement has been a problem. (Benton)

Goals for the next year included better organization of paperwork and ways to better reach parents.

> One definite goal [for next year] is to be more organized - all of the paperwork was a bit overwhelming at first. Probably another goal would be to become more thorough in my record keeping. (Westbrook)

> Every parent has been invited to view a lesson at school. Phone calls every few weeks - for an update or a reminder to return book bag. They appreciate the frequent contact. (Westbrook)

Classroom Teachers

Five hundred three surveys were distributed to classroom teachers who had students in their classrooms receiving Reading Recovery services. Three hundred ninety-nine of these surveys were returned, a rate of 79%. The teachers were asked how much the Reading Recovery teacher had let them know about the progress of the students who were receiving Reading Recovery. They answered on a scale from 1 to 5; the mean was 4.7 (S=.37). They were also asked to rate the Reading Recovery program from 1 (not a very good program) to 5 (a very good program). The mean response to this question was 4.9 (S=.29).

Comments from classroom teachers often revolved around the pleasant surprise of a previously poor reader learning quickly and seeming to enjoy reading.

> The child moved up a whole reading group! (Westbrook)
>
> What surprises me is that Reading Recovery children enjoy reading so much. (Wiscasset)
>
> Their social skills have improved because they are more confident in themselves.(Westbrook)
>
> [The RR children] are more confident in their reading ability and more willing to take risks. They use reading strategies which they learn in Reading Recovery in their daily reading and writing activities. (Westbrook)
>
> The children 'learn how to learn' and transfer that throughout their school day. (Westbrook)
>
> There are children who slip through the cracks who just need a short term 'push' to get them on track. (Westbrook)
>
> Having taught Grade 1 for many years, I like the components that make such successes. These high risk children would never get the gains they make with RR, had they not gotten the 1-1 attention. (Westbrook)
>
> [RR] reaches lower level children much better than I could in the classroom (more 1-1, which is what they need). (Westbrook)
>
> I saw an unbelievable change in [student]'s attitude because of this program. He is always excited about reading to the class. (Caribou)
>
> The children in RR are careful readers. (University-Ellsworth)

RR is an excellent, sensible program in and of itself. However, what makes it incredible is the RR teacher. (Enfield Station)

[RR] students are able to verbalize the strategies they use. (Washington County)

RR has truly inspired and helped my students. It has also given me insight about reading and writing. (Washington County)

This father had never read to his children. He does now! I call that a tremendous impact on the family. (Enfield Station)

Some classroom teachers felt enriched by the interaction with the Reading Recovery teacher, as in the following comments.

I feel I benefitted a great deal from working with [RR teacher]. I hope that I'll have more RR students in the future. (Westbrook)

Our two RR teachers enliven and enhance the academic and collegial atmosphere of our building. (University-Ellsworth)

Classroom teachers generally felt that parents were supportive of the Reading Recovery program.

[Parents] really appreciate the extra individual attention and the progress in reading. (Westbrook)

[Parents] really respect the program. Parents are asking how their child can get in the program. Parents with children in the program are talking very positively about it to other parents. (Westbrook)

The primary concern voiced by classroom teachers was equity, in other words, concern for the children who do not receive Reading Recovery.

This is my concern - At first grade level, taking only the very bottom students - I feel the student that sometimes could benefit the most sometimes doesn't get help. One of my students has brain damage so he used a slot. Another student - of average intelligence but needing a jump start - didn't get into the program. At first grade level, students haven't always been identified for special services if there seems to be a problem. (Westbrook)

My only frustration is that all students who need the program are unable to have the services. (Washington County)

I think many more children could benefit, but they score just a little too high to qualify, even though they are struggling in class. (Westbrook)

We have many more kids who qualified for RR but they 'had to wait for another slot to open up.' (Westbrook)

Often times the very young children who will need an extra year are the ones chosen for RR because they are so low. I think more children would benefit if they started out with children having difficulties but not due to their lack of maturity. (Westbrook)

I wish more staff (RR trained) were available to help these students. (Westbrook)

Some classroom teachers were concerned that the children missed important information when they were out of class in Reading Recovery.

[I wouldn't want any more of my students involved in RR because] children miss a lot of classroom time and consistent scheduling is a problem. (Westbrook)

My one reservation with any pull-out program is that the children are often out of the room when important concepts are introduced. It is very difficult time-wise to 'reproduce' lessons for these children. (Westbrook)

Some classroom teachers expressed other concerns, such as reading comprehension skills and a Reading Recovery follow-up program for second graders.

[It is] my wish to see some kind of follow-up in the fall for all RR second graders!! I wish they could all be seen for 2-3 weeks for a "brush up." The transition to second grade is, for many, difficult. A quick check-in with a very familiar adult to review and practice strategies is essential. I really think this would cut down Chapter I referrals of our RR students. (Westbrook)

I feel that comprehension skills are not focused on enough. The children I have that have gone through RR can read but struggle with comprehension. (Westbrook)

Conclusion

Reactions to the Reading Recovery program were very positive for the 1994-95 school year. Administrators lauded it as a good program, some also asserting its cost-effectiveness. Classroom teachers praised the program, while raising worthy concerns about equity and minimizing missed information in the classroom. Parents almost universally praised it. Reading Recovery teachers and teachers in training attested to its effectiveness in teaching

children literacy skills and applauded the professional development training it offered them as well.

The biggest concern of the classroom teachers and some administrators was that Reading Recovery was not being distributed equitably to students who both needed it and could profit from it. One of the characteristics of the program that is both uplifting and frustrating is that success cannot be predicted. That is, there are no known traits or characteristics of children that can be used to predict whether they will or will not meet with success through Reading Recovery. Some children do not benefit, but these children cannot be "weeded out" at the beginning. This is uplifting because every child (barring most cases of severe mental or physical disability) is given an equal chance at success. It is frustrating because it means that some children who are not successful take up the "slots" that other children, who could have been successful, might have filled.

Another concern, voiced by administrators, Reading Recovery teachers, and classroom teachers, is that there needs to be more classroom support for Reading Recovery. To begin to address this issue, communication could be improved between classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers. Some classroom teachers who were able to interact with the Reading Recovery teacher or teachers, found that this was a positive, enriching experience. It is reasonable to expect that with little or no communication, classroom teachers are likely to feel somewhat alienated or even threatened by a Reading Recovery teacher who teaches a previously non-reading child to read. It is important to stress that Reading Recovery does not simply bring an expert to do what the classroom teacher could not. Reading Recovery is meant to be "something extra," on top of good classroom instruction. It is based on the idea that some children need extra help in a one-on-one setting. A classroom teacher cannot spend time with a child one-on-one without sacrificing the educations of the rest of the students.

The final concern, raised by respondents from all categories, is the threat to continued funding for Reading Recovery. Even respondents who raised concerns with the program expressed the strong desire to continue it. Reading Recovery's successes, along with positive statements from administrators, teachers, and parents, are the best reasons to continue the program into the future. Careful attention to feedback, such as that presented in this report, will help to maintain Reading Recovery as a dynamic and responsive program in Maine.